THE PARTING AT MILETUS

A SERMON

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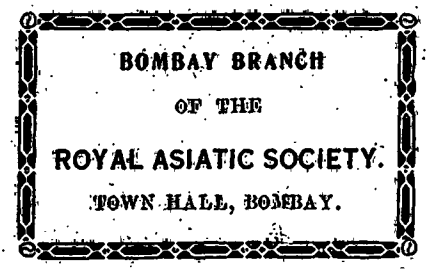

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THE PARTING AT MILETUS

A Sermon

PREACHED IN

THE CHAPEL OF MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE

ON THE

XXI. SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, OCTOBER 21, 1866,

In Memory of

GEORGE EDWARD LYNCH COTTON,

BISHOP OF CALCUTTA:

LATE MASTER OF MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE.

BY

GEORGE GRANVILLE BRADLEY, M.A.

MASTER OF MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE:

LATE FELLOW OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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THOSE who knew and valued the friend whom we have lost, will excuse the many obvious deficiencies of this tribute to his memory. They will find in these pages some narrowness of view, some poverty of thought, and much inadequacy of expression. But they will remember that they were written and preached under the depressing influence of sad suspense and sadder certainty, and that they are sent to the press at the very moment when a fresh and severe affliction has made a careful revision well nigh impossible. Be their faults what they may, I dedicate them, in sorrowful submission, to the dear and holy memory of the truest of friends, and the most devoted of God's servants. May He who has taken him from us, and from the Church, raise up others who will labour in the same spirit!

MARLBOROUGH:

Oct. 28, 1866.

SERMON.

Acts xx. 25.

'And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.'

These words form a portion of the parting address of St. Paul to the elders of Ephesus; they are the farewell of the founder of many Christian Churches to the representatives of one of the most cherished of those infant communities.

For the tie that bound St. Paul to Ephesus was one of unusual closeness. To others he was a founder; to them he was something more than this and dearer. He had not only brought them into the fold of Christ, but he had lived among them as their familiar and habitual friend and pastor. Elsewhere he had assumed the character rather of the first missionary and herald of the Christian faith than of a resident and permanent teacher. Two or three short visits were all, so far as we can judge, that he gave even to his dear friends at Philippi. The Galatians, to whom he writes with all

the authority of a parent, knew him, it seems, only by a single visit. But at Ephesus he had fixed his residence for a space measured, not by days or months, but by years. There too, in spite of bitter enemies on the right hand and on the left, his work had borne rich fruit. If he had met with unusual opposition, he had also been blessed with unusual success. If, in the chapter which our Church reads over her departed children, he speaks of *having fought with beasts at Ephesus** in the hope of immortality, on the other hand the result of his long labours there is summed up, by him who records those labours, in the words, *So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*†

And these men, his converts and disciples, loved him dearly; and as he hurried on towards Jerusalem, whither an imperious voice, which he could not put aside, drew him to his doom of long imprisonment and final martyrdom, they came at his summons to meet him at Miletus, to look on him, to listen to him, once more, to hear his last words, and to receive his final blessing.

I dare not linger on those words—that scene; yet there are points in each which may well touch the hearts of some of us, whose thoughts are full of things nearer to us to-day. He called them to witness that in no spirit of self-confidence, that in all humility, amidst many difficulties, he had laboured, regardless of

* 1 Cor. xv. 32. † Acts xix. 20.

himself, to impress upon them the central truths which he preached—Repentance towards God and Faith in the Person and the Work of his and their Master, Christ Jesus. He knows, he said, that unknown dangers await him, but none of these things move him in comparison with completing the one special work which God has given him to do; he warns them against the dangers to which they themselves would shortly be exposed; and he closes with an earnest entreaty to build up their community on the foundation of mutual love and help and self-sacrifice, reminding them of the words of the Lord Jesus, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.**

And they to whom he spoke felt his words. A long and honoured career lay before that infant Church. Many a well-founded historical association, many a pious tradition, gives dignity and greatness to its after-history. But of all this they knew nothing; and as they rose from kneeling with him in prayer, they all, we read, wept sore; sorrowing for the dangers which awaited their beloved Apostle, sorrowing it may be for their own perils, but sorrowing *most of all for the words which he spoke, that they should see his face no more.*†

And I have ventured, not without much hesitation, to take one fragment of his words to guide in some degree what I would say to you to-day.

Not indeed without hesitation. So rapidly do school

* Acts xx. 35. † Acts xx. 38.

generations pass away, that he, who a few short years ago was well known and dear to hundreds in this place, is now to most of you but an honoured memory; and I have to speak to you of the life, and of the work, and of the loss, of one whom you never saw, whose face and form are known to you only through this or that inadequate likeness, whose voice you never heard, whose hand you never touched; and there is a danger, a possibility of a danger, of my being unable to command, as I would desire, your entire sympathy.

But for all this I have put aside my doubts, and shall speak to you, as though you too had lost a friend, and could feel that loss.

For I remember, and I would remind you, who you are to whom I speak. You are not a mere passing throng of individual boys, committed for a few years to the care of individual teachers. It is no private household, depending on a single head, and liable on his death or departure to be scattered to the winds, or to be transferred by his will to another person or another place, of which you claim to be members. If it were so, it would have been vain for us to have looked for the sympathy which we have already found at your hands—idle to have expected that the black cloud which has darkened our lives would have cast the faintest shadow over yours; and those whose eyes have been wet, and their hearts heavy, since that disastrous message was flashed across the world, would have judged amiss, when they turned, as they have

turned, their thoughts to Marlborough as the one place where best of all their passionate grief would be understood.

No! It is as members of a permanent and enduring community that you have done right, the youngest among you, to wear this mourning, and to feel that loss. It is well that you should feel that your School has a continuous and growing life, in which you are links; that you yourselves, your own generation, are not, so to speak, self-contained and isolated; but that you have drunk in the influence, shared the life, of those who came before you; that you represent, at this moment, not yourselves only, but those who are no longer with us; that as their gains and successes are your gain and joy, so their losses also are in very truth your losses; and that he who speaks to you speaks not only to the School of to-day, but to the School of the past—not only to the Marlborough of the present, but to the Marlborough of the absent.

And we mourn to-day one whom, by a loving misnomer, we sometimes call our Founder. Founder in one sense we have none. No single mind can claim to have at once conceived the idea of such a School as this, and by a single act of munificence planted it deep in English soil. We have no Royal or Episcopal name to which we trace our origin, like the two most ancient of our great Public Schools. We look back on no noble-hearted citizen of three centuries ago, as do two others less ancient, if not less honoured. We owe our

birthday as a School to the co-operation of many wills and many minds. A great need was felt, and many hands joined to supply it. Among these there were those whose names are still honoured, whose presence is still welcomed here. They are still left us—the men who laboured once, and labour still, with entire singleness of aim and purpose, to promote the prosperity and enlarge the usefulness of an Institution, of which they may well claim to have been, in a very high and honourable sense, the first Founders.

Yet none know better than they—none, let me add, better than he who first of all, and he also who now fills this place which eight years ago was vacant—that for any image of that highest and noblest of relations in which St. Paul stood towards those Ephesians, we here must look to the life of one man, and of one only. There is a place in the history of a School which not the very wisest of absent friends, nor the most generous of absent benefactors, can attempt to fill. There is a possession to be cherished by the School to which it has been granted above wealth, or fame, or prosperity. There is a gift which is better than very precious things—a substitute for even time-honoured associations, and the long-gathered result of historic memories. It is the possession and the memory of one who holds towards a School the position which one man held to Rugby—which he whom we mourn to-day held to Marlborough. It is not the Founder, not the Ruler, not the Benefactor, not the Teacher; it is something

that transcends and includes all these: it is the Apostle of our School whom we lament to-day. It is as such, and no other, that we shall hand down his memory.

Let me explain what I mean. I have spoken elsewhere to you, elsewhere and here, of his services towards this place. You and many others are aware, that at a time when an experiment, untried before, seemed to have failed, he was the one instrument without which the good offices and generous help of others would have fallen to the ground. It is no exaggeration to say that to his calm judgment and unflinching perseverance this School owes its continued existence then, its comparative prosperity now.

I do not care to press this to-day. There are higher gifts than those of mere existence. Man doth not live by bread alone; and a School might be full to overflowing for a time, and rich and prosperous, and yet have no reason to thank him who called it into being—be no blessing but rather a curse to those who entered it; for it might be no nursing mother, but one who sent forth her children not better but worse than she received them.

Nor do I care to dwell on him as our Organizer. Enough to remind you that we owe to him, directly or indirectly, the system of discipline, of life, of teaching, under which we now live; that we are still to-day filling up the outlines which he sketched, the framework which he laid down; that we are carrying out

and developing his work, realising and completing his ideas.

Yet it is not on these points that I would fix your attention. When we, who knew him best, look back on that six years' work, we may admire the calmness, the judgment, the courage, which saved and invigorated and systematized your society; but our deeper reverence we keep, not for the Preserver, not for the Ruler, not for the Teacher, but, as I said before, for the Apostle of this School: for the man who worked here, even as St. Paul worked at Ephesus: daily cultivating in himself the heavenly mind of which he loved to speak; setting before you in word and deed the life, the example, the spirit of his Saviour; going in and out among you as one who worked for a Master that was in heaven; drawing towards him, by the mere force of his simple singleness of mind, the esteem, the affection, the reverence of his pupils; making it his one aim to breathe into the young and plastic frame of a new society, the result of his own watchfulness, and prayers, and faith, and earnestness, and noble aims; to build up week by week in the pulpit, and day by day in his life, the ideal of a Christian life and of a Christian school.

Him we mourn to-day, we who knew him, very bitterly—you, who knew him not, in your due measure; and as we look back upon his life, let us catch even now some of its best lessons.

He came here, as you know, not a young man, nor inexperienced. Fifteen years before he had been

summoned from Cambridge to the side of Arnold; and for the next five years he was among the most loved and trusted colleagues of him who, living and dead, fulfilled that strange prophecy that he would one day change the face of English education. And when Arnold's death, sudden almost as his own, sent a shock through England, it seemed as though there were one man who had caught, not indeed the genius of his master, not his rare force of character and intellectual power, but almost a double portion of his desire to deepen and quicken, and confirm and establish, the spiritual side of English school life. To this work he deliberately set himself, and for years he worked on in Arnold's school, carrying out with minute and systematic faithfulness every duty of the teacher; cultivating his own powers in half-years and holidays with the marvellous and untiring industry which distinguished him to the last; building up in simplicity and humility his own higher self; always learning, always advancing; gaining every year wider influence, and more hearty affection; setting his mark every year on a fresh group of pupils: of pupils who are at this day men of learning, men of eminence, men of useful and laborious lives, and who, almost in proportion as they are one or other of these, thank God for the day which drew them to his side.

Yet it is well and right to remember that his success, great as it was, was neither rapid, nor complete, nor unchequered. He had little of the charm of manner which in some men is itself a passport to the hearts of

others—none of the ready address and superficial tact which come unsought to far less earnest spirits. His immediate friends, above all his own elder pupils, he drew to him with an enthusiastic and tender love. Homage, loyalty, affection, reverence, no one word is strong enough—they know it well—to express all they felt and feel. But the feelings with which he inspired them, and some others, were out of all proportion to his effect on those who stood outside his nearer influence. He was often misjudged, misunderstood, undervalued, even by those whose opinion was honestly and independently formed; not rated at his real worth outside a circle: a circle large, important, yearly increasing, yet still for long years a circle whose limits fall far within those of the society to which he belonged.

I dwell on this not merely to avoid uttering one false word of the friend whom I have lost—(let no homage but what is wholly genuine be paid to that most genuine of lives)—but because there is surely to be found in it a cheering and a hopeful lesson for us all. Who of us, young or old, but may gain some encouragement for the spectacle of one who, placed early in life in a profession which seemed, in many of its parts and duties, singularly uncongenial to him, yet by mere earnest, prayerful, single-minded efforts to fulfil all its duties, achieved at last a marvellous success in the very points in which he seemed at the outset to fail most signally? The promise was fulfilled. His

Heavenly Father, to whom he prayed so earnestly, gave him the very 'good things' which he needed most. He seemed, how often have we heard it said of him!—he seemed, as time went on, to develope new faculties, to become master of fresh gifts. Decision, promptness, knowledge of mankind, came to him as gold comes to the patient miner. One year we were drawn to him: the next we loved him: the next we reverenced him. If there is one feature in his life to which his friends would unanimously point as most distinctive of the man and most instructive to themselves, it would be the steady growth which he seemed to draw from his own single-minded efforts to overcome his own deficiencies, and to forget himself for the good of others. Who of those—I ask it with pride and joy—who of those who knew him in his earlier manhood, would have selected him as the man destined to remodel and harmonise, and rule and inspire, a large, disorganised, and apparently turbulent community? Who would have believed that he who was so dear to his friends, yet often so coldly looked on by others, would win the hearty and affectionate confidence of a group of men living outside the pale of scholastic life, such as the absent Governors of this School?—or that he would have secured the hearty affection of a mixed society of young men and boys to whom he was a stranger? Who even later would have guessed that he would have one day developed the tact, the dignity, the lofty and serene wisdom, which won for him

in India the respect of the statesman, the civilian, the merchant, the soldier, the native prince, the educated Brahmin, the humblest Hindoo? Who would have felt secure that he would have drawn to him so promptly the hearts of his own clergy—of men who differed so widely from each other, on some points, and in some cases, so widely from himself? Who, finally, would have looked for the active spirit and physical energy which made him traverse the length and breadth of his enormous diocese, penetrating with something of the zeal of an apostle, and something also of the intrepidity of an explorer, into districts and corners where no Christian bishop had been seen, till one came whose bodily gifts, as men count such things, were few, whose physical activity seemed small? As we think of these things, we remember by whom and to whom it was said, *My strength is made perfect in weakness.**

Let me hasten to his life here. Its best memorial lies in all that is best among *us*; in the best traditions that still live among *you*; in the memory and influence of his work; in the affectionate reverence of his scattered pupils. Nor would I dwell at any length on the difficulties which he had to surmount here. They are fully known but to few; they will never be very widely known; it is enough to record the firm belief of one who knew but a part of them, that it would have been

* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

no disgrace to the ablest or the best of men to have failed to meet them.

But time passed, and he did not fail; and he gathered round him a band of fellow-labourers ready to face all difficulties in his own spirit of entire and unrepining self-sacrifice; and he and they began in time to reap the one fruit which they most desired of their unbought and unselfish labours. His work, their work, told more slowly on the outer world. There was a pause, an interval, which his friends at a distance watched with some misgiving, when stationary or diminished numbers marked some want of confidence, some strange ignorance of the man in the world of parents. But his courage never faltered. He seemed to feel that he was called of God to build up this School as a school that should deserve success, and that success would come in due time.

And it came. Fathers and mothers learnt to value him as their sons' best friend; his pupils gave him their whole hearts. Never before, never elsewhere, had he been, I will not say so well, but so widely, recognised for the man he was. It was no longer the few, or the limited circle, but the many, who learnt to recognise that undeviating fairness, that earnest piety, that systematic 'unresting never restless' industry. Not the few, but the many, learnt what a store of tenderness and warmth lay veiled beneath that seemingly cold, and to some even repelling, manner; what a spring of friendliness and sympathy, what a fresh rill of genial and mirthful humour, played beneath that dry tone of

sometimes unwelcome, yet always guileless, satire; how those sermons which they heard on Sundays, those short addresses on other days, were the rich and genuine though calm outpouring of a heart open to every influence of the Holy Spirit; how true and loving and lasting was his interest in themselves as individuals; how high and pure and noble his aims for their School.

And just when they had learnt to value him at his true worth he was called away, and left to his successor the inheritance of his patient toil, the result of all his labours, the aid of his loving counsel and sympathy. The ground was wellnigh cleared, the good seed widely sown: other men had laboured, and we have entered into their labours.

Once he revisited you: I say *you*, for I cannot put aside that sense of continuity of life of which I spoke, and I speak to you as the School which he ruled. One more Sunday he spent among scenes which will gather a fresh dearness from his memory, and once more he gave to you and to us his parting counsels, and what we now know to have been his final benediction. And he who speaks to you remembers well how his heart was cheered, and touched, and gladdened, by what he spoke of as the romantic outburst of feeling which greeted him here; how he wrote, the day after he had left us, to say that each of those two days had been too short for the delight and happiness of that last visit. And we remember too, when one of us, and one

of you, accompanied him, as the Ephesians accompanied St. Paul, to the ship that was to bear him from us—how, amidst the hurry and distress of parting, his last act was to kneel in prayer for the School that he loved, with the successor of his choice.

Of his work, his eight years' work in India, others will speak and write. His name will stand high in the noble roll of Christian missionaries. But, year by year, one feature of that work has been brought before you—his earnest desire to promote the dear cause of Christian education in the land of his adoption. And from the School of his adoption, some hearty response to his unflagging interest in the joys and sorrows of this place has reached him yearly, and yearly also has been tenderly acknowledged; and the time was drawing near when we might look forward to see his face, and hear his voice: to show him how and where his work had grown.

And all this, and more than this, has come to a sudden and bewildering end. How, we know not—where, we know not. But we know that, at the outset of a journey which was to take him to the farthest extremity of his diocese, he has fallen a victim, as we say, to one of those 'perils of waters' which are still, as once, the lot of travellers and missionaries; and that all our hopes, selfish and unselfish, are vain. More than this we yet know not, and we can but lay our hands on our lips and be dumb. 'The Lord,' we read

this morning—'The Lord is in His Holy Temple: let all the earth keep silence.' *

It seems the very saddest of all news. That that Indian work should be cut short; that the Church, not of India only, should lose that calm wisdom, that quiet, patient, thoughtful energy; that so many hearts should be cut to the quick, so many lives darkened—that loving household circle be left so desolate! And we mourn—not for him; for in the very midst of doing his Saviour's work he has been called away into his Saviour's keeping; the soldier of Christ has passed away by a death as brief as that of his soldier father. Yet there is a pang in the thought that that loved form may have been swept by a heathen river to an alien ocean; not suffered to rest in his own cathedral; far from the village churchyard, hard by us, where he once thought to lie. Yet even to this we bow; we know that he has mounted high—

Through the dear might of Him who walked the waves.

But we must needs mourn for the vast dependency that has lost his guardianship; for the Church that has lost one whom, amidst this strife of tongues, she could least spare; for the widow, for the fatherless. And beneath and behind all this is the instinctive and irrepressible sense of natural sorrow that our friend is gone; that he will never again see the friends he

* Habakkuk ii. 20.

loved, or mark the progress of the School he ruled; and beneath the stress of that 'heavy change,' we too feel that we are at one with those men of Ephesus, that we seem to sorrow most of all for this, *that we shall see his face no more.*

Let us take comfort, friends far off, and friends who are near. Let us thank God for having given us that friend, this School that head. There are many who knew how great, how incalculable, the debt they owe him; there are many only dimly conscious that they are his debtors. But let us, who know what it was that God gave us in such a friend, cherish tenderly, as we surely shall, his memory, and try to light within our own hearts that flame of loving, untiring, self-sacrificing devotion. As we add his name, the most precious of all, to the names of those dear servants of Our Lord and Master whom this young School has already lost, may we strive more earnestly, each in his measure, to fill his place, or at least to carry on the work, the Christian work, which he had most at heart! And may we all learn from his example what a mysterious power lies in the single-minded and unselfish aim at a standard of faith and goodness and usefulness above our own; how God's Spirit is given in larger and fuller measure to those who daily seek it; how we, who can scarcely guide our own steps, may learn greatly to aid others, if we will keep our hearts pure and simple and undefiled; how the fruits of the Spirit are within the reach of all, and how weakness may be trained to strength, and

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God's Grace win triumphs that are beyond the reach of genius! *The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.**

* 1 John ii. 17.

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